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SUBJECT: UNGA; REPORT ON AFRICAN DELEGATIONS AT THE 64TH
GENERAL ASSEMBLY

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Classified By: Classified By: Ambassador Rosemary DiCarlo for reasons 1
.4(d)

¶1. (U) Gerald Scott has returned to advise the U.S. Delegation to the General Assembly on African affairs for the ninth year in succession. Following are his views of this 64th General Assembly and the performance of Delegations representing Africa Bureau states.

Introduction and Summary

¶2. (SBU) The diplomatic atmosphere of this General Assembly was lightened by the "Obama Effect," the perception that the United States was re-engaging in multi-lateral diplomacy. In fact, we made an effort to join consensus on a number of resolutions (with explanations of vote) rather than voting against them as in previous years. However, the opposition of Cuba and several other hard-line members of the Non-Aligned Movement and G-77 did not go away. We lost some ground on issues where Palestine/Israel questions were the subject (or inserted into) various resolutions. On the other hand, we gained some support for country-specific human rights resolutions. Fifteen delegations voted for one or more of these, and the argument that there is an African consensus against country-specific human rights resolutions is decreasingly credible. The resolution on Defamation of Religions, which we oppose, passed, but with reduced support.

In the Security Council, Gabon and Nigeria will replace Burkina Faso and Libya next year. We were, as always, the subject of some direct criticism in the General Debate, this centered on U.S. Cuban policy.

The General Debate

¶3. (SBU) The initial period of Sept. 23rd to 29th was reserved for the addresses of the Chiefs of State and Heads of Government (and the occasional Foreign Minister or even Permanent Representative), each of whom had, in theory, fifteen minutes to share his wisdom with a waiting world. Some dealt in extenso with the particulars of their country's situation, but most of the speeches were indistinguishable one from another. Africans called for economic assistance, attention to climate change, support for peacekeeping, acknowledgment of special burdens (refugees in, e.g., Kenya and Chad), reform of the Security Council (meaning "not less than two permanent seats" with all the prerogatives including the right of veto and five non-permanent seats -- the Ezulwini Consensus).

¶4. (SBU) One point to watch for: criticism of another country, a matter of concern, given the diplomatic politeness that prevails at the UN where any direct criticism of another country is distinctly exceptional. Still, Burkina Faso noted problems in Guinea and Madagascar; Mauritius regretted developments in Honduras and Madagascar, and mentioned its problem with France over Tromelin; Comoros criticized France, gently; Eritrea and Djibouti exchanged accusations. The Gambia criticized "some member states" who blocked countless helpful resolutions with impunity, referred to "locust invasions" by which President Jammeh meant multilateral corporations, and the United States, both for our support for Israel and the Cuban Embargo. In voicing objection to our Cuba policy, the Gambia was joined by South Africa, Zimbabwe, Lesotho, Namibia, Chad, and Angola. When, out of 192 member states, only the United States is the object of criticism in a speech in the General Debate, it strikes me as something warranting a query at the Foreign Ministry -- if not, sometimes, something more.

Credentials Challenge: Madagascar and Guinea

¶5. (SBU) All African countries spoke in the General Debate except Madagascar. When, on Sept. 25th, the unconstitutional president, Andry Rajoelina was scheduled to speak, he was blocked. The DRC Foreign Minister, speaking for SADC, raised a point of order under the Rules of Procedure objecting to the seating of the unconstitutional government. They had, it turns out, discussed the maneuver with the GA President earlier, and it was agreed, according to the Office of Legal

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Affairs, that the President would have to rule against the point of order. However, the rules provided that such a judgment on a point of order could then be submitted to the membership in the chamber. There had been almost no prior consultation, and most delegations were caught off-guard with no opportunity to think the question through to any considered view. The result was 4 in favor of the President's ruling (Madagascar, Denmark, Ecuador and Malaysia), 23 against (all of SADC except Lesotho and Mauritius, plus Congo and Kenya and eight others), 6 abstaining (including Cameroon and Mali). The rest, including the United States, did not participate in the vote. Madagascar then left the hall.

¶6. (SBU) Most of the African delegations, while representing countries opposed to the Madagascar government, did not join SADC in the move. We were told by two respected Ambassadors that there was distinctly inadequate consultation in the African Group and that the exclusion of a Member State by point of order was not easily supportable.

¶7. (SBU) The exclusion of Madagascar on the narrow issue of participation in the General Debate did not affect participation in all the later General Assembly work. We had understood in late November that a challenge to the General Assembly credentials of Madagascar and Guinea would NOT be made, but in a Committee meeting on Dec. 8th, Tanzania and Zambia (the only African members) challenged the credentials of both. The argument: both sets of credentials were signed by "unconstitutional" governments, suspended for that reason by the AU. The governments, whatever the status of mediation efforts, remained unconstitutional and suspended, and the (at least implied) AU position that the challenge be made was still in effect. However, the SADC move had not been coordinated with the entire African Group at the UN, and some objected to this. An African Group meeting was held on Dec. 11, and it was decided to support deferral, rather than rejection. This position was adopted by consensus of the Credentials Committee, thus granting "the right to participate provisionally in the activities of the 64th session." A reprimand of sorts, but not an exclusion.

Security Council Elections

¶18. (U) The elections this year were uncontested. Burkina Faso leaves the Council at the end of the year. Uganda remains for another year. Gabon (replacing B. Faso) and Nigeria (replacing Libya) join. It is generally true that African council member delegations are led by particularly competent Permanent Representative. This is certainly true in the case of Burkina Faso and Uganda. On the other hand, even reinforced delegations often have even less time for General Assembly issues, so we shall see what leadership Nigeria and Gabon (heretofore often distinguished by absences) provide next year in the GA.

Anti-Israeli Resolutions

¶19. (U) This has been a more than usually difficult year for Israel in the General Assembly. The atmosphere was conditioned in part by the issue of the Goldstone Report (authorized by a Human Rights Council resolution) following on the Israeli/Hamas conflict in the Gaza Strip beginning last December. The resolution endorsing the report, the "Follow-up to the Report of the UN Fact-Finding Mission on the Gaza Conflict," passed: 114 - 18 (US) - 44. The AF vote was 32 - 0 - 8 and 8 absences.

(AF abstentions: B. Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Ethiopia, Kenya, Liberia, Swaziland, Uganda) Other occasions were also found to inject an anti-Israeli element into a text.

¶10. (U) But the principal packet of objectionable resolutions aimed directly at Israel are put forward in Fourth Committee dealing directly with Palestine. We vote against all of them, but in particular we lobby against the "Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People" (chaired by Senegal), the "Division for Palestinian Rights of the Secretariat," and the "Work of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices."

The votes:

-- Committee on the Exercise, etc.:

63rd GA:107 - 8 (US) - 57 AF votes: 34 - 0 - 1 and 13

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absent

64th GA:109 - 8 (US) - 55 AF votes: 36 - 0 - 2 and 10
absent

-- Division for Pal. Rights:

63rd GA:106 - 8 (US) - 5 AF votes: 34 - 0 - 1 and 13

absent

64th GA:112 - 9 (US) - 54 AF votes: 38 - 0 - 2 and 8 absent

-- Work of the Sp. Committee:

63rd GA: 94 - 8 (US) - 73 AF votes: 30 - 0 - 6 and 12

absent

64th GA: 92 - 9 (US) - 72 AF votes: 30 - 0 - 6 and 12

absent

Cameroon abstained on all three (as last year); Benin abstained on the first two (last year voted yes on all); Botswana, Burundi, Cote d'Ivoire, Ethiopia and Liberia abstained on the Work of the Sp. Committee (as last year). (As the votes indicate, it is somewhat easier to convince delegations to abstain on the Work of the Special Committee.) In the negative direction, changes occurred where delegations which did not participate in one or more votes last year chose to vote for all or some of these resolutions this year. Of particular note, the DRC, the Gambia, Niger and Sierra Leone all voted for two resolutions where last year they had refrained from participation.

Country-Specific Human Rights Resolutions:

¶11. (SBU) Our biggest push during the General Assembly is to ensure passage of the country-specific human rights resolutions introduced in 3rd Committee. This year (as last year) there were three: North Korea and Burma (sponsored by the EU) and Iran (sponsored by Canada). These have always passed, but not without great effort, and much of the lobbying has been to stimulate opposition to any "no-action motion," a procedural move to avoid voting on the text which the Iranians have used and have at times brought close to success. This year we were again engaged and gained a number of pledges to vote against any "no-action motion," but none of the three introduced the procedure in 3rd Committee. These issues are often difficult for African delegations. There is a radical Non-Aligned Movement position against them, and a gut feeling among a number of African delegations that this is a weapon that, in other and not inconceivable circumstances, could be turned against them or their neighbors. And the argument that name-and-shame is not appropriate. And the argument that the issue is inevitably politicized. And the argument that the proper forum is the Human Rights Committee in Geneva. But we reply that the General Assembly and its Third Committee have historically been an appropriate venue for such considerations, that the General Assembly, unlike the HRC, has a universal membership, and that egregious offenders merit GA rebuke. And if it were not (at least to some degree) an effective tool, the target regimes would not expend so much energy opposing the drafts.

12.(U) At the time of writing, the Plenary votes on these texts have not taken place, so I compare below last year's plenary votes with this year's votes in Third Committee.

The votes:

-- DPRK:

63rd Pl.: 94(US)-22-63 AF votes: 11-4-27 and 6 absent
64th 3rd Com: 97(US)-19-65 AF votes: 12-3-29 and 4 absent

-- Myanman/Burma:

63rd Pl.: 80(US)- 5-45 AF votes: 5-2-21 and 20 absent
64th 3rd Com: 92(US)-26-65 AF votes: 10-2-30 and 6 absent

-- Iran:

63rd Pl.: 69(US)-54-57 AF votes: 2-14-26 and 6 absent
64th 3rd Com: 74(US)-48-59 AF votes: 4-11-28 and 5 absent

13.(U) On the DPRK:

Voting YES: Botswana, Burundi, Eq. Guinea, Eritrea, Ghana, G-Bissau, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, S. Leone, Togo, Tanzania.

Voting NO: Somalia, Sudan, Zimbabwe

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Abstaining: Angola, Benin, B. Faso, Cameroon Cape Verde, CAR, Comoros, Congo, Cote d'Ivoire DRC, Ethiopia, Gambia, Guinea, Kenya, Lesotho, Mali Mauritania, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Niger, Nigeria Rwanda, Senegal, Seychelles, S. Africa, Swaziland, Uganda, Zambia

Absent: Chad, Djibouti, Gabon, Sao Tome

14.(U) On Burma/Myanmar:

Voting YES: Botswana, Burundi, Eq. Guinea, Liberia, Malawi, Mauritius, Nigeria, S. Africa, Togo, Tanzania.

Voting NO: Sudan, Zimbabwe

Abstaining: Angola, Benin, B. Faso, Cameroon, Cape Verde, CAR, Comoros, Congo, Cote d'Ivoire, DRC, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Gambia, Guinea, G-Bissau, Kenya, Lesotho, Madagascar, Mali,

Mauritania,
Mozambique, Niger, Rwanda, Senegal, Seychelles, S. Leone,
Somalia, Swaziland, Uganda, Zambia

Absent: Chad, Djibouti, Gabon, Ghana, Namibia, Sao Tome

15.(U) On Iran:

Voting YES: Botswana, Eq. Guinea, Liberia, Madagascar,

Voting NO: Comoros, Eritrea, Guinea, G-Bissau, Mauritania,
Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Somalia, Sudan, Zimbabwe

Abstaining: Angola, Benin, B. Faso, Burundi, Cameroon,
Cape Verde, CAR, Congo, Cote d'Ivoire, DRC, Ethiopia, Gambia,
Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Mali, Mauritius, Mozambique,
Namibia, Rwanda, S. Leone, S. Africa, Swaziland, Togo,
Uganda,
Tanzania, Zambia

Absent: Chad, Djibouti, Gabon, Sao Tome, Seychelles

16.(U) Significant switches:

On DPRK:

Positive: Eq. Guinea and S. Leone from absent to yes;
Guinea from no to abstain

Negative: Comoros from yes to abstain

On Burma/Myanmar:

Positive: Malawi, S. Africa and Tanzania from abstain to yes;
Eq. Guinea, Liberia, and Nigeria from absent to yes.

Negative: Eritrea from yes to abstain.

On Iran:

Positive: Eq. Guinea and Madagascar from absent to yes;
Congo, Gambia, Malawi, S. Africa, Togo from no to abstain.

Negative: G. Bissau, Nigeria from abstain to no.

17.(SBU) Comment: Africa is moving in the right direction on these resolutions. Positive switches clearly out-number negative ones. And the argument that there is any African consensus against country-specific human rights resolutions is decreasingly credible: fifteen delegations voted in favor of one or more of these texts. (Last year twelve did so.) Those voting for all three: Botswana, Eq. Guinea, Liberia. Voting for two: Burundi, Madagascar, Malawi, Togo, Tanzania. Voting for one: Eritrea, Ghana, G-Bissau, Mauritius, Nigeria, S. Leone, S. Africa

On the other hand, votes against the resolution on Iran (clearly identified as our most important vote of the GA) should not, I think, go unremarked. The Department and Embassies will have to determine what blame or mitigation to assign; circumstances vary. But from the USUN perspective, votes against the Iran resolution especially are a distinct disappointment.

Defamation of Religions

18.(U) Another important issue for us was the OIC-sponsored resolution on the Defamation of Religions. Embassies lobbied on this, and while the Plenary has not yet voted, the comparison with the results in the 63rd General Assembly represents a slight improvement.

The 63rd Plenary vote: 86 - 53 (US) - 42.

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The AF vote: 27 - 2 - 14 and five absent.

The 64th 3rd Committee vote: 81 - 55 (US) - 43

The AF vote: 25 - 0 - 16 and 7 absent.

19.(U) Votes in the 64th 3rd Committee:

Voting YES: Angola, Benin, Comoros, Congo, Cote d'Ivoire,
Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Gambia, Guinea, G-Bissau, Mali,

Mauritania, Mozambique, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, S. Leone, Somalia, S.Africa, Sudan, Swaziland, Togo, Uganda, Zimbabwe.

Voting NO (with the US): none

Abstaining: Botswana, B. Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Cape Verde, DRC, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Namibia, Rwanda, Tanzania, Zambia.

Absent: CAR, Chad, Eq. Guinea, Gabon, Liberia, Sao Tome, Seychelles.

20.(U) Last year, Cape Verde and Liberia voted NO. Benin and Congo went from an abstention to YES. But Lesotho and Namibia went from YES to an abstention.

Comment

¶21. (C) With the new administration in Washington, the working atmosphere in the General Assembly has improved. The impression that we have re-engaged with this institution has to some degree been reciprocated, perhaps a warmer welcome in my calls and meetings and a greater willingness to engage in dialogue. And we have deliberately sought to minimize the confrontations on a number of resolutions. For example, in the First Committee (Disarmament and International Security) the number of "no" votes by the U.S. was reduced from 23 last year to 10 this year -- sometimes accompanied by explanations of vote to set out our difficulties with a text we might otherwise have opposed. All this has been greeted favorably, but serious differences in approach to issues necessarily remain.

¶22. The Africa Group at the UN, one of the five regional groups which comprise the organizing blocs of much of the General Assembly work, is both the largest such group and composed of some of the weakest states. In New York, the Africa Group includes all the members of the AU, but even considering only the Africa Bureau delegations (subtracting the North African littoral) we are dealing with twenty-five percent of the membership. The natural interests of the poor and weak and the understandable inclination to hang together rather than hang separately mean that very often we are confronted with solid opposition to US views and interests.

¶22. Within the group there is a strong tradition of support for Palestine and against Israel, for more radical positions on economic and financial issues, and a reluctance to confront human rights offenders directly. Egypt exercises a baleful role in New York, and the other North African members of the African Group here are thumbs on the scale when Near East questions are addressed. However, there is some at least marginal change, especially on the human rights issues. Fortunately, there are several helpful Ambassadors here: Tanzania (but Ambassador Mahiga is reportedly to be replaced at some point soon), Botswana, Liberia (Ambassador Kamara is new, but gives a good impression of competence and energy), Mauritius (though Ambassador Soborun's private expressions of solidarity do not translate into many votes in our favor). I am encouraged by the current South African Permanent Representative, Ambassador Sangqu, but it is said he will be recalled shortly. Togo's Ambassador Menan knows the UN well and his delegation is proving helpful. Benin's Ambassador Zinsou has a long-standing record of cooperation with USUN -- dating to their time on the Security Council. One might expect more from Uganda were they not so occupied with Security Council responsibilities. And Burkina Faso's Ambassador Kafando has been an excellent UNSC member, but, perhaps because of that, not of much weight in the General Assembly.

¶23. All in all, the General Assembly has gone relatively well. But such progress as we have made depends on constant representation of our views, coordinating with Europeans and others where we can, expressing our interests in capitals as

well as cultivating the Missions here. It is a truth which needs to be put very indirectly, but a truth none the less: one of the few ways many countries can return the support we give them is to be helpful to our interests in the UNGA. But the issues come with a history, often unfavorable to us. And it requires much one-on-one diplomacy. This, however, over time is having an effect, especially since some of the factors which have conditioned Africa-wide responses are changing. We have made some progress this year, and with continued engagement we will make some more. And as we attempt to manage the UN and the General Assembly, the African membership is an inevitable (and often helpful) element in our effort.

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